

Freedom Requires Subjugation

For unto me the children of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 25:55)

All of Chapter 25 of Leviticus, consisting of most of this week's Parasha, deals with keeping impoverished Israelite small landowners from losing their land permanently. Losing land-ownership pointed the way to serfdom and servitude, and preserving the "freeman" status of Israelites is the point of these and many others of the Torah's laws. But if "freedom" is so important to the Torah, what does this concluding passage mean by saying that the Children of Israel are meant to be servants or slaves to God? Why doesn't it end instead with what it really means in this context, saying that God gave us freedom from slavery in Egypt and these laws are meant to preserve that freedom?

With my bar-mitzvah students, I often end up in discussions about medieval knighthood. In that way I try to explain the Talmud's classic concept that "the servant of a king is a king [himself]." My bar-mitzvah students, after all, are almost at the age when page-boys graduated to become squires, eventually to become full knights themselves, from there advancing to the nobility and lordship. I explain to them that although freeman status was preserved through passing on freeman status as a kind of nobility, that freeman status had to be earned through faithful and humble service to a lord. Our arm-tefillin, which I interpret as descending from a form of ancient leather armor, end in triple-rings around the finger, which can be interpreted as bridal rings or as rings of fealty and power given to a knight or other vassal. In the Book of Esther, King Ahasuerus gives over his signet-ring to Haman then to Mordecai, and they officially become the king's ministers and vassals. In knighthood ceremonies, the knight or other vassal often simply kissed his lord's ring, and something similar in terms of fealty to a lord is implied in the giving and acceptance of a ring in our wedding ceremonies.

The grant of freeman status given over to the nobleman bound him to the strictest and most exclusive terms of service to his lord. It was a granting of freedom and terms of servitude at the same time. It was a granting of tremendous power, but at the cost of a massive subjugation and an exclusive demand for loyalty. These concepts are often familiar to my students through their reading of the "Lord of the Rings" series, but they have far more ancient roots. It's not that the feudal lord desires subjugation per se, but by selfless subjugation and service the vassal freeman helps ensure that the lord has the wherewithal to protect and ensure safety and prosperity for the entire realm. While our God may not appear to be in need of human service as much as an earthly king, our service to Him in following and executing His Laws allows Him to assure justice and order in His realm. So for us, too, preserving our freedom requires our willingness to subjugate ourselves to God's service loyally and faithfully.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Behar

Consecration Anniversary of 70th Street Synagogue (1897)

May 20-21, 2022 | 20 Iyar, 5782

SCHEDULE

Hertz: p. 531 | Haftarah: p. 539

Kaplan: p. 630 | Haftarah: p. 1174

Candle Lighting | 7:52 pm

Friday Evening Services | 7:00 pm | Main Sanctuary

Zemirot | 8:15 am

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Outdoors on Paved Paradise

Youth Program | 10:00 am | Gabi & Raph | Fidanque Youth Room

Kiddush | Outdoors on Paved Paradise | *Sponsored by Lewis Bateman, in memory of his father, Benjamin Bateman*

Shabbat Afternoon Class will not meet this week.

Shabbat Afternoon Services | 7:55 pm | Main Sanctuary

Shabbat Ends | 8:53 pm

Weekday Service Times

Morning Services

Sunday: 8:05 am | Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evening Services

Sunday-Thursday (Minha/Arbit): 6:30 pm

THIS SUNDAY

The New Amsterdam History Center & Congregation Shearith Israel invite you to

Music of Many Worlds

Sephardic Vocal Music of 18th-century Amsterdam

This Sunday, May 22 | 4:00 pm | In person at Shearith Israel

Refer to our emails for the link to register.

COMING UP THIS WEEK

Shearith Israel's Caring Connection

4th Annual Smash the Stigma

A Jewish Communal Conversation on Mental Illness & Suicide

IN PERSON, This Monday, May 23 | 7:00 pm

These profoundly important *Smash the Stigma* events help raise awareness and facilitate conversation about difficult realities.

Refer to our emails for the registration link.

Sanctuaries & Cities:

Synagogues of the World and the Stories They Tell

This Tuesday, May 24 | Virtual Only

"Artists, Statesmen, Scholars: The Portuguese Esnoga"

For the full schedule, lecture titles, and to sponsor or register, refer to our emails.

SHABUOT

Rabbi Soloveichik's Shabuot Lecture

Saturday Night, June 4 | 11:00 pm

Enjoy this annual public lecture — Come for the Torah; stay for the cheesecake!

Honor our Longtime Choirmaster, Leon Hyman

Day I of Shabuot, Sunday, June 5 | Tribute deadline: Tuesday, May 31

Help us celebrate Leon Hyman's 66 years of service to Shearith Israel.

See our emails for instructions on how to pay tribute to Maestro Hyman.

Girls' & Young Women's Annual Ruth Reading

TWO OPPORTUNITIES TO LISTEN!

In person on Shabuot Day II, Monday, June 6

Virtual date: Sunday, May 29 | 9:00 am

COMING UP

You don't want to miss this special screening of
Upheaval: The Journey of Menachem Begin

with introductory remarks by Rabbi Soloveichik

Wed, June 8 | 7 pm | 334 Amsterdam Ave, Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan

In memory of Ambassador Yehuda Avner, whose opus, The Prime Ministers, inspired the production

In Rabbi Soloveichik's words: "As we mark the anniversary of the Osirak operation, we remember the man who stunned the world in 1981, a leader who joined strong action with communion to the past, who could order an ingenious operation and then pray to God for its success, a leader who joined faith and political leadership, a leader whose legacy looms so large today."

Take advantage of our discount code "shearithisrael50" for 50% off!

Refer to our emails for the registration link.

Annual Chatham Square Memorial

Memorial Day, Monday, May 30 | 10:30 am

Held at Chatham Square Cemetery, 55 St. James Place

Guest Speaker: Rabbi Yosef Zarnighian, Assistant Minister at Mikveh Israel & Air Force chaplain

All ages are welcome. No registration required!

2022 Graduate Scroll of Honor & Graduation Kiddush

Shabbat, June 18 | Following Morning Services

Let's spread the good news and celebrate the success and accomplishments of all our graduates from pre-school to PhDs! Sponsor the kiddush in honor of our graduates, and submit your graduate's information to ensure that we can properly list and congratulate them in our 2022 Graduate Scroll of Honor.

Refer to our emails for the link.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Hazak u'Barukh to **Josh Eisen**, who recently visited Ukraine and is working to build temporary housing for refugees in Ukraine.

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Support West Side Hatzolah!

While you are all familiar with the work Hatzolah does, during the past year, West Side Hatzolah has also invested over \$1 million dollars in vehicle infrastructure, including 2 ambulances, and 3 Emergency Response Vehicles (ERVs): They count on our support to finance these important upgrades!

To donate, go to hatzalahthon.com/westsidehatzolah/sp.